

Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony Honoring the Women Airforce Service Pilots
Senator Mikulski's Remarks
Wednesday, March 10, 2010

"Today, all of America stands in salute to the 1,074 Women Airforce Service Pilots known and lovingly treasured across this country as the WASP. As we gather today, we know your contributions were often unrecognized, your personal service and self sacrifice was unrewarded, and your love of the Airforce and military service was often unrequited and unreturned. We are here today to undo those wrongs - an act that is long overdue.

"The greatest generation that saved democracy and Western civilization was not limited to one gender. You gave all that you could to save the United States of America and the world that was at war. You gave America your lives, your love and your devotion. Today, Congress gives you the Gold.

"The Congressional Gold Medal for the Women Airforce Service Pilots is the highest expression that we can bestow for courage, service, and dedication to our country. You and those WASP who are not here today, those absent friends, deserve this recognition. You served our country during World War II in our country's time of need. You answered the call of duty and you did it on your own dime.

"I am so very proud to have co sponsored this bill with my dear friend, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. This bill is not about partisanship, it is about citizenship. It is not about whether you are from a red state or a blue state. We need to start being the red, white, and blue United States of America.

"WASP were the first women to fly military aircraft. You flew fighters, bombers, cargo and training aircraft. You flew in every type of assignment flown by men except in combat. You also flew in the face of gender bigotry and even gender hostility. Yet true to your calling, you defended America and you became trailblazers and true patriots.

"You flew over 60 million miles, in 12,000 planes, at 120 American bases, and 14 WASP hailed from Maryland. During those times you, like your male counterparts, came in on a wing and a prayer.

"When the war was over you came home. Thirty-eight of you came home in a pine box that your family had to pay for. Many of you had to scrape to pay your own bus fare home. Despite all this, you held your head high because you knew you had flown in the wild blue yonder. Today, because of your valor and trailblazing, women are serving in the United States Airforce and military. Women now serve as fighter pilots, astronauts, helicopter pilots and search and rescue. You created this opportunity.

"So as the Airforce song goes, "off we go into the wild blue yonder and fly high and to the sky," but instead of giving you the gun, today, we give you the gold!"